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71.2009 085.05698

Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

William N. Doak

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ADDRESS AT LUNCHEON
OF THE TRUSTEES OF LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
MAYFLOWER HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D. C.
FEBRUARY 12, 1931.

It is a distinct honor to be invited to have a part in this celebration of the anniversary of the birth of one of the most loved of human leaders and one of the greatest outstanding figures of all history.

It has been nearly 65 years since Lincoln sat at his last Cabinet meeting held the morning of Friday, the 14th of April, and the evening of that same day he was carried from Ford's theatre to die in an humble house across the street.

During the years that have passed since that tragic day, the memory of Abraham Lincoln has been surrounded by romance, a wealth of legend and tradition, from which there is difficulty in separating the true from the romantic, but from which comes to me a clear vision of a man whose every heart beat was in sympathy for his fellowman.

From the beginning of that last day until his brain was paralyzed by the bullet of an assassin, Lincoln's thoughts and acts were for the freedom of mankind, and his last official act in the Executive Office, before leaving the White House on that fatal evening was to write a pardon for a prisoner, who was to be released on "taking the oath," the name of the President being signed to the pardon. Had Lincoln known that this would be his last official act, he would have thought it a fitting

final deed, none could he have done anything that would have been more typical of his life.

It was 2400 years ago that a Chinese philosopher, speaking of the politically great, said: "He who when called practices his principles for the good of the people, and when disappointed in that, practices his principles alone, he whom riches and honors cannot corrupt, whom poverty and mean position cannot swerve from principle, whom power and force cannot make bend, he is worthy to be called truly great and courageous."

Measured thus, Lincoln may well head the list of the illustrious in history. His life was rooted deep in the soil from which come the multitudes of humanity, the common people whom he loved and served, for whom he fought and died. Such a fighter often finds himself battling alone, and many times during the Civil War Lincoln felt the loneliness of his position. He did not always have the hearty support of Congress. Everything he did, his selection of generals, his conduct of the war, his attitude toward the states in rebellion, all were often criticized and condemned in the Senate and House. The very aristocracy of official Washington was slow to accept the gaunt, homely man who was to mark the beginning of a new era in American history.

The supreme test of greatness, of sincerity, and of integrity, is in the way a man stands steady when he seems to be fighting alone. Lincoln was unmoved by criticism or condemnation.

As the son of a Confederate soldier, I yield to no man in reverent homage to the memory of this great man, whose place in the hearts of the people has so expanded with passing years, and whose memory is most revered by every patriotic American.

My position as representative of the Labor of the country ever causes me to pause when Lincoln is the subject of any meeting, to honor his memory, for he came from the ranks of those who toil, and not only held in high esteem the people from whom he came, but dignified and glorified labor because he had a part in it.

I look upon my friend, Dr. John Wesley Hill, and am reminded that Lincoln's love for the common people was not for the moment, but was woven into acts that will cause his love to live through all time, for Dr. Hill is Chancellor of Lincoln Memorial University, said to be the greatest memorial to Lincoln ever established. It has been well called a "living memorial," where youths of 7, and those of 70, find an educational beacon to guide them from ignorance to intelligence and its accompaniment of prosperity and happiness.

Dr. Hill may tell you that Lincoln's own vision was responsible for the creation of the University, so I need say no more about that. My birthplace was not far from Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, where the University is located, my people are of the same stock as that from which Lincoln came, and from which come

students of the University. I not only know the needs of those who live in the mountains of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia, but I also know the wonderful service that has been rendered to people of a dozen states by this institution since its foundation nearly 35 years ago.

The clouds were heavy over Lincoln when he passed from life to the glory of immortality. While those clouds did not part during his life, his faith in the common people, his love for them, and his desire to build for them that which would help the most humble, has rolled those clouds away and the full sunlight is pouring upon the memorial, from whose doors thousands have gone with a better knowledge of life and better equipped for life.

No better work could be done than Dr. Hill is doing, no better monument could be built than this memorial university which bears the name of our greatest American.

W. R. Dook

2:30
Release ~~3:30~~ p.m.
Central Standard Time
Friday, June 12, 1931.

ADDRESS BY W. N. DOAK
UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF LABOR
AT
DEDICATION OF LINCOLN MARRIAGE TEMPLE
HARRODSBURG, KENTUCKY
JUNE 12, 1931.

W. N. Doak
June 26, 1931

This occasion commemorative of things basically American, typifies in the sharpest sense what may be the individual realization of the hopes of our people. From the marriage solemnized in this cabin, which in spiritual effect has become a temple, came the fulfillment of the American promise that out of the humble things of life greatness can spring. The aspirations of youth, the dreams of parenthood found fruition through the child who now belongs to the ages.

In days like these through which we are passing when the great problems of state and life are testing men's hearts, it is grateful to find a refuge to which we may turn, there to commune with the souls of the pioneer age.

In coming to you to-day as the representative of the President of this Republic, intrusted with the duty of conveying to this assemblage his sincere greeting on behalf of the Nation, I do so with pride, yet in humility because of my realization of the inadequacy of any words of mine properly to express the sacredness of my mission.

Here a century and a quarter ago, a young man and a young woman pledged themselves one to the other and entered together upon the family life, hopeful of the future for themselves and for their children, but never probably daring so much as to dream that of their union would be born a son whose name, next to that of the Father of his Country, would be written highest in the scroll of the American great.

Yet is it not remotely possible that the ruggedly determined nature of these pioneers of our country brought to them a hope that the lowly would become the lofty, and that faith like that of the prophets of old and Mary of a later day caused them to see a vision which inspired them to persevere in a life path beset with brambles?

Let this be as it may, the fact remains unchanged and unchanging that from the union consecrated here sprang the Emancipator, the Statesman, the Humanitarian, the Savior of our Country—Abraham Lincoln.

My own lot having been cast with those who suffered privation, having known the necessity of self-sacrifice, and not always knowing what the morrow might hold, the appreciation of the family struggle begun here is by me all the more keenly realized. But, nevertheless, I think that all of us know that strength which overcomes difficulties is the real strength, and that troubles make sweeter the success which overcoming brings. I think it is the world's belief to-day that the hardships undergone by Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, and later by their son Abraham, heartened the Emancipator for the work which in perspective seemed almost impossible of accomplishment. He overcame.

It seems inevitable that when a man rises to greatness from humble beginnings that historians in order to make his accomplishments seem the more remarkable are apt to draw too dark a picture of the conditions of the childhood of him whose life they are portraying.

There have been those to speak and to write of Thomas Lincoln, Abraham's father, as a man of whom little good could be said. Thomas has been pictured as a wastrel, but investigation in the spirit of fairness to him has shown, I think conclusively, that he was a man of faith—one who did his duty to his family and to the communities in which he lived.

Of the mother, it has been written: "A great man never drew his infant life from a purer or more womanly bosom than her own."

There were hardships, privations, and worse than privations probably, in the lives of the members of Thomas Lincoln's family. It is not necessary, however, to spread abroad untruths about the characters of men and women to accentuate the greatness of their off-spring.

In one sense it is proper to say that from this Marriage Temple in the one-time wilderness came Abraham Lincoln, born though he was elsewhere. No one knows that from this assemblage, from these eternal hills there may not spring one day another emancipator who will guide this Nation through some great crisis. May not some American of the future, cradled in scenes like these, save this country, if unhappily, it should be in dire danger from destructive influences either from without or within?

These hills, these lofty peaks where strong men live and commune with God, where fields and forests make the love of freedom instinctive, where individual independence thrives, make for that sanity of mind which condemns class-consciousness, race hatred and religious bigotry. It is in lands like this that God is recognized as the Guardian of the peoples and the Director of the destinies of nations; in places like this where "every man's house is his castle," even though it be but a cabin such as this.

Our country will be free and our people united so long as the principles and precepts of the pioneers are remembered and their ideals of justice are preserved. The Eternal give us more men who will stand for God and Country, holding firmly to the basic conviction that "right is might;" men who are willing to recognize that the humble have their majesties, the contrite their leaderships and the just their strength of ruling.

Not all men can be leaders, but any man with a properly adjusted sense of proportion and with a proper instinct for the right can recognize leadership and be a willing follower when once he has assured himself that its goal is justice. There are those, unhappily, who have not such a sense of proportion, and it is these that the demagogue makes his prey.

It is the demagogue who thinks that violence of language makes for strength of language. He persuades with a noisy tongue. And again there are those on whom mere sound and fury seem to have their effect. Education has advanced rapidly in this country for many years, but there are still those of us who seemingly can not as yet distinguish between the real and the sham. The mountebank still has his corner pulpit and still draws his auditors. All men should strive to be able to distinguish between reason and unreason, between the logical and the illogical.

In the meantime, the understanding ones ever must be on the alert to meet falsehood with truth and glib persuasion with sound answer. No demagogues are ever humanitarians, although their all-time attempts are to persuade their hearers that only through heed to their words can happiness come to the human family. The application of that sense which is inherent in most men and women—common sense—should be used to test the teachings of these perverters of the truth. They can not stand the test and no one knows it better than he who uses words to lead astray. His dependence is upon the glitter of his speech, not only to attract but to hold. He is a self-seeker. Have none of him.

The child born to the parents wedded in this Marriage Temple was never a demagogue. He was direct and logical. His persuading tongue was the tongue of truth. The ruggedness of his honesty, the simplicity of his life, his courage for the right and his masterfulness in the fields of just endeavor were in part the endowment of his heritage and in part the acquirements of hand and head, the one ready to grasp and the other ready to retain. Of such stuff was made the man whose Virginia parents came forth from that doorway a century and a quarter ago as man and wife.

From Nature's lap spring men who place their country's needs above selfishness, honor above gain, and freedom above truckling.

This is the hour for a rebirth of patriotism and the day for unselfish service. It is the time for a rededication to Americanism. No better place, no finer setting can be found than this for a renewal of our faith in the Almighty, the strengthening of the determination that destructive forces shall not prevail. Those who would have us adopt strange doctrines, disruptive of all we hold dear, and all that the fathers held dear, preach to us in words that are "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals." There is sound but no substance. They mouth of nothingness.

These so-called saviors of our country will do well to save themselves when Labor stops contributing to their support. Might it not be well to suggest to them that they lay aside their banners and their trumpets to put hand to some implement of honest toil? Destructionism has no place in the land of Heart's Desire.

This Marriage Temple was the scene of the first chapter in the story of the wedded life of Thomas and Nancy Lincoln; the greater chapters of the unfolding tale were written by their son, Abraham Lincoln, whose memory now is in the treasury of humankind.

